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# LEARNING FOR ALL: ALTERNATIVE MODELS & POLICY OPTIONS

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# **LEARNING FOR ALL: ALTERNATIVE MODELS & POLICY OPTIONS<sup>1</sup>**

Ash Hartwell. Center for International Education, University of Massachusetts

The greatest barrier to achieving the Millennium Development and Education for All goal of universal, quality primary education by 2015 is the inability of public education systems in the poorest countries to adequately reach and educate large segments of their populations. Not only are significant numbers of children underserved in terms of access to education, the public schooling that is provided fails to provide most who do attend with basic literacy and life skills. This failure has enormous consequences for national education systems, for countries' human resources and economic development. However, complementary models for providing primary schooling, typically provided through NGOs, have been able to reach and effectively educate these under-served areas and populations, often doing so far more effectively than the formal public system. Yet there are few countries that have developed policies and partnerships within national education sector programs to build on the experience and insights that complementary models provide. This paper reports ongoing research that explores how it is that complementary education models organize and deliver primary schooling that assures children's learning, and examines policy implications for achieving quality basic education for all children.

## **Education for All or Learning for All?**

Without the knowledge and skills provided through basic education, children, and the communities where they live, have little hope to improve their wellbeing in the world today. From 2000, the date of the EFA Summit in Dakar, to 2004 it is estimated that there was significant progress in expanding access to primary schooling, particularly in the poorest countries. Yet large numbers of children, estimated at 77million in 2007, are still outside the reach of formal primary schooling.<sup>2</sup> Those out of school are found in countries that have recently emerged from civil conflict such as Afghanistan, southern Sudan, Somalia, Sierra Leone and Liberia. But there are larger numbers within countries that are politically stable, but with under-served groups who seem to be beyond the reach of effective public schooling, groups such as the scheduled classes of rural India; nomadic populations in Ethiopia and the Sahel; orphans in southern Africa—a consequence of world's highest rate of AIDS; girls living in the small rural hamlets of upper Egypt; and the children of rural districts in northern Ghana.(Atchoarena & Gasperini, 2003; UNESCO 2005b; UNESCO 2006).

A recent analysis of these trends reveals that within those countries where two-thirds of all out-of-school children reside, the greatest challenge is to reach these underserved areas. International datasets on education do not provide statistical data on these underserved areas, and the discourse on EFA goals and strategies until recently has largely ignored the least served

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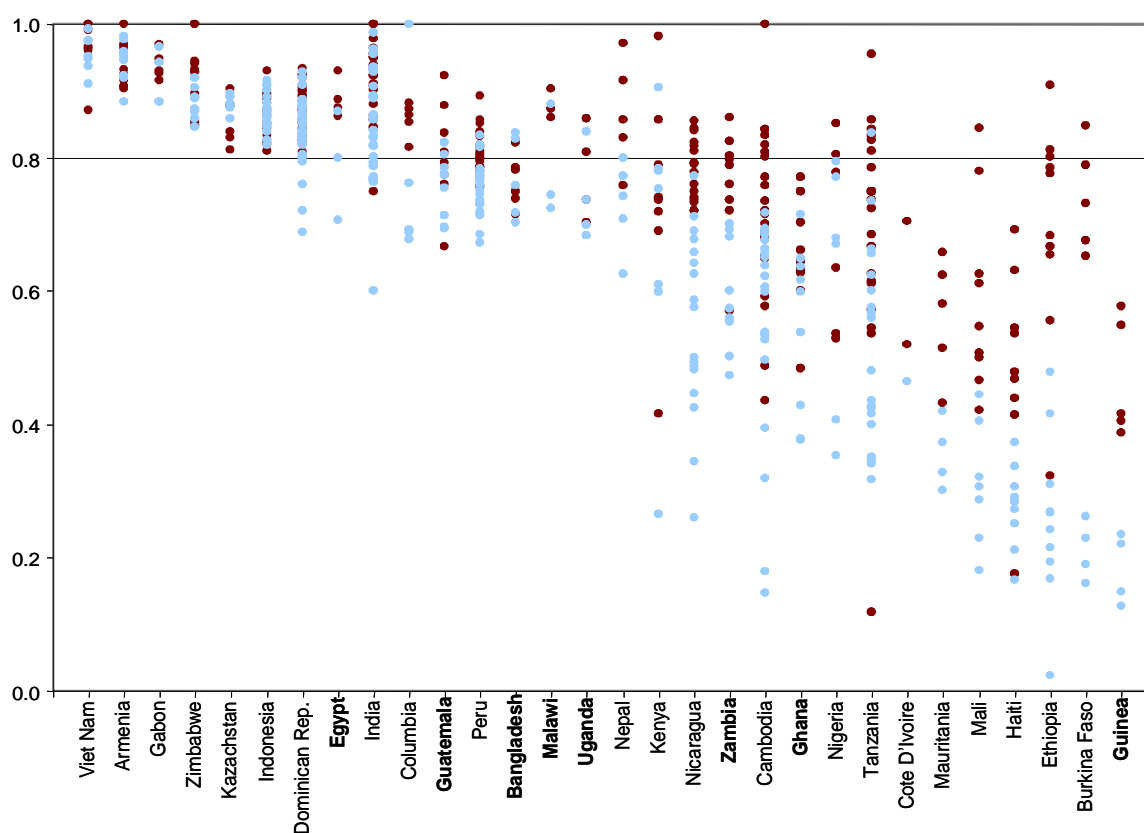
<sup>1</sup> Published in W. K. Cummings and J. H. Williams (Eds.), *Policy-Making for education reform in developing countries: Policy options and strategies* (pp. 141-180). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield. 2008. This research is supported by USAID through the EQUIP 2 Project, Cooperative Agreement #GDG-A-00-03-0006-00 and was undertaken with Joe DeStefano, Audrey Moore, David Balwanz, John Gillies, and Joseph Farrell. Thanks to Colette Chabbott for an insightful critique and suggestions.

<sup>2</sup> The EFA Global Monitoring Report has recalculated out-of-school children to take into account children of primary school age who were attending secondary level education, thus reducing earlier estimates of 115 million out of school in 2000 to 100 million. See UNESCO (2002, 2005, 2006, 2007)

populations, concentrating on national indicators and plans.<sup>3</sup> Virtually all countries have achieved the goals of access to basic education in urban centers, although even in urban centers the poor often do not complete primary schooling. A recent UNESCO Institute of Statistics analysis suggests that 82% of those out of school reside in rural areas (UNESCO 2005). These areas are generally the most distant from metropolitan centers, have the weakest communications and transportation infrastructure, and are home to ethnic and linguistic minorities.

An analysis of subnational urban and rural areas of thirty Less Developed Countries, drawing data from the Demographic and Health Surveys, indicates that in those countries with high national attendance rates *all regions* have high access to schools. In those countries far from universal primary education, *regional inequality* is very high. This phenomenon is illustrated in Figure 1, where net attendance rates for urban and rural subnational areas are plotted, with countries ordered from highest to lowest net attendance (Wills, Hartwell, & Zhao, 2006).

**Figure 1. Sub-national net attendance gaps in 30 countries (data from DHS surveys. Light dots=rural areas; dark dots = urban areas)**



<sup>3</sup> Notable recent analysis of disadvantaged rural populations include the FAO initiative *Education for Rural People*, which has sponsored conferences with UNESCO in Ethiopia in 2003 and Columbia in 2007, see [http://www.fao.org/sd/erp/erpeventslast\\_en.htm](http://www.fao.org/sd/erp/erpeventslast_en.htm). Also see Atchoarena and Gasperini, 2003; and UNESCO, 2005.

This analysis illustrates that those countries with the highest national attendance levels have dots (areas) closely spaced at the top of the figure, meaning that in these countries *all* regions have high levels of attendance. In the countries with low national attendance levels, dots are spread widely: there are a large number of regions with extremely low attendance rates. For example, in Ethiopia there are only a few urban areas with attendance rates above .7 (70%) and a large number of rural areas with attendance below 50%, including areas as low as 20% in the Somalia region.

Until very recently the international policy discourse on EFA and MDG has paid relatively little attention to the disparities of education access and quality within countries, focusing attention on national indicators and gender disparities. The evidence here makes clear that the greatest challenge to MDG and EFA goals is for education policies and programs becoming attentive and responsive to specific sub-national contexts and cultures (Molteno, Ogadhoh, Cain & Crumpton, 2000).

### **Education for All or Learning for All?**

Today, the importance of basic education for children, in all regions of the world, can hardly be overstated. The world has evolved a global economy marked by increasing participation in popular political change and complex economic options and relationships. Although the best of basic education honors and builds on the culture that gives individuals and communities their identity and meaning, it also provides a critical window to information from the larger world that is needed to survive and prosper. Parents in the poorest, most isolated villages place education only behind food as a priority for their children's wellbeing. They are right. It is asserted that basic education is essential for economic growth, it supports the growth of civil society and democracy, lowers fertility rates, helps women to raise healthy children and farmers to reap bigger crops (Center for Global Development, 2006). Amartya Sen, the Nobel Laureate economist who links development to human freedom, has argued that illiteracy and innumeracy are major sources of social deprivation, and represent extreme insecurity in the face of a changing world. (Sen, 2003).

It was these considerations that led to the EFA declarations in 1990 and 2000, and to the inclusion of basic education as one of the core Millenium Development Goals. An implicit assumption of these ambitious international compacts is that the term education is a proxy for learning. The national education sector plans that are a central modality for achieving EFA link access to basic education with the expansion of primary education. The sector indicators of access and completion of primary education feature in virtually all national plans of countries receiving international multilateral and bilateral financing. Yet the evidence is now very strong that in the poorest countries, and in the most underserved regions, the great majority of those who do have access to school are not able to read and write with understanding.

Many more children are going to school than in 1990, and countries increasingly claim to be 'on track' towards EFA and MDG targets. Uganda and Malawi in the mid 1990s, followed by other sub-Saharan African countries in the years following 2000, declared policies of "free" and compulsory primary education, radically increasing officially registered pupils. Are these policies building human development capacity? Are children learning?

There are relatively few systematic and regular, national programs to assess learning outcomes in developing countries. One of the best known regional efforts has been the Southern and Eastern African Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ). Findings from two series of national surveys, assessing reaching fluency and comprehension of sixth grade pupils, indicate that achievement levels are declining in several sub-Saharan countries. In the survey conducted between 2000 and 2002, in 13 out of 14 countries fewer than 30 percent of students attained mastery in reading. It was only in the Seychelles that just over 40 percent of pupils were able to read with fluency and understanding. In Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Uganda and Zanzibar, fewer than 10 percent could read at a desirable level. (UNESCO, 2007, pp.60-61). Africa is not alone in the crisis of school literacy. A recent national survey by Pratham in India, reported in the Economist under the headline ‘Is our children learning?’ (Economist, 2006) found that in Standard V, 47% cannot read a Standard II text. (Pratham, 2007). Abadzi, in her groundbreaking analysis, *Efficient Learning for the Poor: Insights from the Frontier of Cognitive Neuroscience*, notes that in Pakistan only 34 percent of the 11-12 year olds completing primary education could read with comprehension, and only 20 percent could write a simple letter. (Abadzi, 2006, p.5). Few developing countries participate in the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), and those which do score at the very lowest level. As reported by Filmer, Hasan, & Pritchett (2006, p7).

The *average* reading ability of Indonesian students was equivalent to that of the lowest 7 percent of French students. The average mathematics score among students in Brazil was equal to the lowest scoring 2 percent of Danish students. The average science score among students in Peru was equivalent to that of the lowest scoring 5 percent of US students.

As with the analysis on access to education, there are patterns within countries that show very large disparities in learning outcomes between urban and rural areas, larger than the differences in reading scores between countries. A careful analysis of the SACMEQ assessments indicates that there is a vast gap between the resources, socio-economic and school conditions of urban and rural areas. In those relatively rare cases where rural schools provide the opportunity to learn, as indicated by adequate school facilities, resources and instructional materials, literate teachers who provided feedback to pupils’ work (as reported by pupils), regular supervision, and the engagement of parents, the gap between urban and rural literacy attainment largely disappears (Zhang, 2007, pp. 599-602).

UNESCO’s EFA Global Monitoring Report notes that “too few countries are covered by the international assessments of student achievement for global trends to emerge [and] the availability of data that would allow monitoring of the quality of education is still insufficient.” (Ibid, p. 61). Nonetheless, the evidence that is available has led to a number of recent studies calling for a shift in the focus of EFA and MGD to more explicitly address learning outcomes. Filmore, Hasan, & Pritchett (2006, p.1) argue:

The Millennium Development Goal for primary schooling completion has focused attention on a measurable *output* indicator to monitor increases in schooling in poor countries. We argue the next step, which moves towards the even more important Millennium Learning Goal, is to monitor *outcomes* of learning achievement. We demonstrate that even in countries meeting the MDG of primary completion, the majority of youth are not reaching even *minimal* competency levels, let alone the competencies demanded in a globalized environment...the goal of school completion is increasingly an inadequate guide for action.

Similarly, The World Bank's Independent Evaluation Group carried out an in-depth analysis of some 50 projects primary education projects receiving World Bank financing and found that:

Basic knowledge and skills—not educational attainment—are key to reducing poverty. Raising enrollments and completing primary schooling are necessary—but not sufficient—to ensure basic literacy and numeracy. Developing countries and partner agencies such as the World Bank need to focus on raising learning outcomes, particularly among disadvantaged children, to realize the poverty reduction benefits of investing in primary education (World Bank, Independent Evaluation Group, 2006, p1)

International and national discourse has focused on access to basic education as a fundamental social good, supported by a neo-liberal economic analysis of rates of return to schooling indicating that the highest rates of social return are for primary education. What is the evidence that learning, rather than access, makes a difference in economic and social development? A recent study by Hanushek & Wossman (2007), drawing on internationally comparable data bases from TIMMS and PERLS, as well as selected national estimates of learning outcomes, find that cognitive achievement is a stronger predictor of economic development than is school attainment.

There is an increasing awareness that there is a vast gap between what we now know about human capacity for learning and the characteristics of schooling and educational planning supported by nation states and international agencies. As Abadzi (2006, p.5) notes, 'in some respects the poor performance is a consequence of enrollment success. Unprecedented numbers of students in countries like Uganda and Kenya have entered public schools that traditionally taught only those who could perform.' Schools that fit a middle to upper-class, urban setting, fail in providing opportunities to learn in for the rural poor.

There are critics of this shift from Education for All to Learning for All. Some argue that the EFA and Millenium Development Goals are already beyond the capacity of many impoverished countries, and will only serve to undermine the credibility of the social goal of having all children obtain a quality basic education. (Clemens, 2004; World Bank, 2006, p.100 (David Archer's comments)). Whatever the critique of the shift of policy discourse to explicitly focus on learning outcomes for basic education, the case against simply providing more funds to expand existing forms of what is clearly dysfunctional schooling to reach marginal populations is strong.

National education sector analysis and plans, required as a condition for the international financing of education systems in the poorest countries, are largely focused on objectives to expand and improve a standard schooling model. This model may work in well resourced environments, but in many countries there is an appalling lack of appreciation or concern by policy makers and educators about the context, the culture and language, the conditions and the challenges of children in poverty. In a study of state schools in impoverished regions in nine countries Molteno and her colleagues (Molteno, Ogadhoh, Cain & Crumpton, 2000) characterize the typical classroom as one where:

- The teachers are not responsive to children's needs, and their harshness depressed the children's capacity to learn and develop;
- Children are not encouraged to learn in the way they are best able to (actively) or to acquire learning skills they could use outside the classroom;
- The schools do not provide effective teaching in literacy and other basic skills;

- The experience of school does not prepare children for real-life challenges

They note that ‘Where *all* these limitations apply it is almost certainly more damaging for children to be in school than out of it.’ (ibid, p. 24)

On a field trip this year, during which I served on a team observing nine primary schools in the Ghana’s Central Region, the following notes summarizing the teams’ observations are representative of the conditions of those schools, classrooms and teachers after a decade of basic education reform:

- In every school we visited (at different times between 8am and noon) a large number of pupils were outside instead of in the classrooms. There was no order to what they were doing. Some were walking about aimlessly, some eating, some playing, and some cutting grass. Teachers were talking to each other often times. There was a class schedule posted in every school, but nowhere did we observe that the head teacher enforced it.
- Many teachers did not have a lesson plan for the day, or, if they did have one, they were not following it. In only one school did we find a teacher that had a lesson plan book that the head teacher had signed off on the different lessons.
- In almost every classroom we observed, once the children did come to class, they were sitting tightly together in rows and responding either in unison to the teacher – who only used English (simple, one-word responses) or responding when called on individually. Children almost always were asked to give one-word responses, and all other children would clap after the response (a performance, perhaps, for the benefit of the visitors). Pupils showed no evidence of understanding the English words that they were using. Teachers often yelled at the children or slammed books on the desk if the child was struggling or distracted, or could not read from the book.

If, within the classroom, there is little opportunity or motivation for pupils to learn, increasing financing and inputs to the system will not transform the relationships that are necessary for improved performance. Thus it is that national sector plans and programs generally focus on inputs, but do not effectively address the challenge of low learning achievement. These national plans set out to expand and improve schools, at considerable cost, that are currently failing to effectively provide basic literacy and life skills.

The international focus on financing for the expansion of conventional schooling as a path to education for all is unlikely to provide the opportunities for access, nor the education quality, that is necessary to reach underserved areas and populations. Given current knowledge about the conditions necessary to enhance learning, and knowing the importance of human learning for social and economic development, a rational policy initiative for national and international policy makers, planners and administrators, would be to pursue strategies for optimizing learning.

## **The Capacity for Learning**

We know, both from direct experience and the evidence of research, that all children are natural born learners. Each child is capable of mastering spoken language, creative play and learning, and developing complex explanations of the world and social relationships. With caring, nurturing relationships and a stimulating environment, children can realize their inherent capacity for investigation, for problem-solving, and for service towards others. This learning is

not an end in itself, but contributes to the evolution of democratic, diverse and caring communities (Abadzi, 2006; Bransford, 2000; Brandt, 2000; Jensen 1998; Perkins, 1993; Gardner, 1993).

This perspective shifts our understanding from conventional concepts and definitions of learning. Learning, as reflected by the typical operations of the school, is primarily about absorbing the content provided by teachers from a national curriculum and syllabus. The measurement of learning is presumed to take place through examinations, which standardize raw scores into a normal distribution. Two presuppositions about learners are inherent in the measurement of learning through standardized tests (and in the psychometrics on which standardized test measurement is based). First, the transformation of raw scores into the normal distribution, the ‘bell curve’, ranks students against each other, sorted into those who are deemed dull, average and bright. This ranking and classification occurs no matter what the range in raw scores – that is what ‘standardized’ testing means. A second presupposition is that learning is a ‘zero-sum’, competitive process. For one student to do better on a standardized test means that another will do worse – that is how the tests scores are constructed. This structure, whatever the intents of policy makers and teachers, essentially pits students against each other in a competitive, Darwinian ‘survival of the fittest’ regime. Those whose scores are in the upper ranges are selected for the limited places in higher education institutions.

The perspective that all children are natural learners is based on a different understanding of learning: We learn through a process of personal transformation, and what we learn increases our capacity to participate in and contribute to society.<sup>4</sup> By personal transformation is meant more than the acquisition of a specific body of knowledge or skill. It involves developing new insights, capacities, and powers. We gain this knowledge, insight, and capacity through relationships with others. The relationship may be through direct contact, as between teacher and student, or through indirect communication, as through correspondence or reading. The relationship may be inspirational, incidental or intensely personal. But what happens in learning is that experience that has an emotional intensity rewires the brain and nervous system and, recent research confirms, cells throughout the body (Pert, 1999). Increasingly, breakthroughs in the cognitive and neurosciences are beginning to reveal some of these cognitive transformational processes. Images show changes in neural chemistry and circuits occurring during the building of memory and the process of learning (Abadzi, 2007, pp.145-152; Kotulak, 1996).

The second part of this definition is that learning enhances our capacity to contribute to society, to communities of practice. Learning transforms our social identity, whether in the work place, in social activities, or at a personal level. When we learn to play the flute, we can join others in making music, and when we learn to speak in a new language it opens up opportunities for dialogue.

The proposition that all children are natural learners is not a utopian vision, it is a belief based on our understanding about the nature of learning, and the increasing evidence from research. Thomas Armstrong in a book titled *Awakening Genius* cites Latin roots of the word *genius* ‘to come into being, to beget,’ while also related to the word *genial*, “festive,” “enlivening and jovial.” Combining these definitions he determines that the word *genius* means “giving birth to one’s joy,” and in education it means “giving birth to the joy in learning” (Armstrong, 1998). Armstrong describes twelve qualities of genius: curiosity, playfulness, imagination, creativity, wonder, wisdom, inventiveness, vitality, sensitivity, flexibility, humor and joy.

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<sup>4</sup> I am indebted to Etienne Wenger for this definition (Wenger, 1996, pp.22-24).



Before undertaking to look at what we might mean by educational policy reform, and specifically what the purpose of that reform might be, it is essential to be clear about what we mean by learning, what are the purposes of education, what is it that is to be reformed? I believe it is useful to conceive that the purpose of education is to *give birth to joy in learning*. An educational system within a society committed to learning would support this purpose. Education systems, including schools, teachers, management, planning and policies, reflect political and social decisions about learners and learning. These decisions, in virtually all public educational systems in the world today, obviously do not reflect the educational purpose of generating joy in learning – with learning understood as a process of personal transformation leading to greater participation in and contribution to society.

### **The Anand Shala Schools Of Gujarat**

The concept of learning and education described here is based on a growing understanding of human learning, it is articulated in the media (ABC News Special: Jennings and Blakemore, 1993) and in political forums, and it is increasingly embodied in the practice of actual schools in a growing number of countries. Schools like the Anand Shala in Bulpudi, Gujarat:

#### **The Anand Shala School in Bulpudi, Gujarat**

The school has an impressive range of activities – yoga, art and craft, gardening, music – apart from the academic curriculum. Headmistress Laxmi Ben K Gavit, who has played a major role in the school's transformation into an 'Anand Shala' (the school of joy) says not only do children have fun in school, they also get good grades. She said, "Today we have been able to provide a healthy and happy environment for our students. And the results have started to show. When our children join high schools, they invariably top."

The school has an average of 90 per cent attendance and in the past several years not a single child has dropped out. In fact, children from neighboring villages that have schools of their own, prefer to walk long distances to attend this school that teaches grades one to seven.

UNICEF trained the teachers on the art of 'joyful learning'. Teachers were shown how to use paper charts and models to make teaching interactive. The children are clearly thrilled to be in such a school. Ask one girl what she likes about her school and the entire classroom begins to speak. "Our teachers don't beat us, we have swings here, we get to drink water, we go for picnics...." With one teacher for every 33 students, a ratio even better than the nationally recommended 1:40, students receive personal attention in classrooms.

Ms. Gavit says it is because children are at the "core of all our activities" that the school is successful. Parents are aware that their children study in an exemplary institution. Even though unlettered themselves, they show a keen interest in the school activities. The school has a 'Mothers Club' that meets once a month to interact with teachers and students. A member of the club, Leela Ben, a farmer, said, "My son and daughter study here. They say they can happily miss a meal but cannot miss school even a single day. The school has had a magical effect on my children and they now talk of going to college."

UNICEF (n.d.) [http://www.unicef.org/india/education\\_801.htm](http://www.unicef.org/india/education_801.htm)

Some would argue that the Anand Shala model is an isolated case, only possible with the attention, resources and support that UNICEF provides, and that it could not serve as a sustainable model for public policy and resources supporting schooling in underdeveloped regions and populations.

This concern is a central policy issue. Having NGO and donor funding provide alternative project approaches to basic education may lead to short term dependency, where government feels absolved of the challenge of reaching the most underserved. Further, and equally problematic, it is asserted that these alternatives are not sustainable, given that NGO and donor support is generally time bound. We will return to this policy challenge after a further look at the characteristics and operations of complementary education programs.

## **The Concept And Practice Of Complementary Education Models**

Anand Shala is not an isolated case. Underserved rural communities around the world, with assistance from national and international NGOs, have organized to provide quality basic education for their children. Well known examples of this include Escuela Nueva in Columbia, Neuvo Unitaria in Guatemala, Educatados in Honduras, EDUCO in El Salvadore, Rural Action Committee (BRAC) schools in Bangladesh, Schools for Life in Northern Ghana, CHANCE in Uganda, community schools in upper Egypt, Zambia, Mali, Malawi and in Balochistan.<sup>5</sup> There are a number of elements that distinguish these cases. Not every complementary education program has all of these elements, or embodies them to the same degree. Yet, taken together they are the defining characteristics for the small but growing worldwide phenomena we call here complementary education.

- The schools provide an educational opportunity for under-served groups (the rural poor, ethnic minorities) and particularly for girls, at minimum (or no) cost to families;
- Schools are developed, organized and managed with and for specific communities, and are typically small and multigraded;
- The school schedule takes account of the work-demands for children from families, scheduling classes and school days in consultation with the community;
- The schools develop a locally relevant, simplified curriculum and pedagogy, reflecting to varying degrees current trends in research on learning;
- The medium of instruction at the outset is in the mother tongue, the ‘language of the playground’, thereby providing for class dialogue and a breakthrough to literacy;
- The curriculum addresses the basic knowledge and skills required by the formal education system, allowing successful pupils to continue in government schools;
- The programs recruit, train, supervise and support teachers, often young women with little or no teaching experience, from the local area;
- Management involves partnerships between private organizations (NGOs), donors, communities and government.

The research and evaluation of complementary education is almost as controversial within the international community as it is for Charter Schools within the United States. A fundamental difference between the Charter School movement in America, and the complementary education efforts in other parts of the world is that complementary programs generally provide educational opportunity where families have no alternative. While they also often provide an innovative learning environment, and a caring support system from the community and the service organization, their principal concern is to provide educational opportunity to children who otherwise would have no access to school. The choice of the term ‘complementary education’, rather than community schools, or non-formal education, is to signal that these programs are designed specifically to complement the public education system and are not dedsigned as non-

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<sup>5</sup> See case studies and reviews for each of these programs in the bibliography.

formal systems.<sup>6</sup> Complementary education programs provide alternative modalities, including the active role of communities, that create a responsive and relevant learning environment for those with limited or no access to public schools. (EQUIP 2, 2007)

Research supported by the USAID funded EQUIP 2 Project has identified and analyzed programs of complementary education in all continents, seeking to better understand and analyze those elements which define their effectiveness. The following table provides brief profiles of some of the larger examples of complementary education programs in Latin America, Asia and Africa

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<sup>6</sup> See Rogers (2004) for an in-depth analysis of the typologies, terms and underlying constructs used in the discourse on non-formal and community education.

**Table 1**  
**Profile of Selected Complementary Education Programs**  
 (data for the period of 1995-2003)

<b>COUNTRY</b>	<b>PROGRAM</b>	<b>SERVICES AND OUTCOMES</b>
<b>Rural COLUMBIA</b>	<b>Escuela Nueva</b>	20,000 schools, 1 million pupils; completion & learning high
<b>BANGLADESH</b>	<b>BRAC NFPE</b>	35,000 schools, 1 million pupils, completion & learning high
<b>BALOCHI STAN</b>	<b>Primary Education Project - Girls</b>	2,200 new schools, 84% enrolment, tripling # girls to Jr. Sec
<b>Northern GHANA</b>	<b>Schools for Life</b>	In 5 years spread to 767 communities, 36,000 pupils, 95% completion (9 mo), with 80% going on to formal schools.
<b>UPPER EGYPT</b>	<b>Community Schools</b>	By 2000 in 200 communities, 70% girls GER, 90% completion
<b>Rural ETHIOPIA</b>	<b>Complementary Schools</b>	350 sites reviewed, 30,000 pupils, high rates of access, completion, achievement.
<b>Rural MALI</b>	<b>Community Schools</b>	50,000 pupils in 1,600 schools with 50% completion to grade 6 Performance equivalent to government schools.
<b>Rural UGANDA</b>	<b>CHANCE</b>	In 2003 88 Centers – 2,000 pupils 3 yr program equiv. to grade 5, expanding
<b>HONDURAS</b>	<b>Educadores</b>	2,800 IRI centers, 370,000 learners to grade 7, 75% success.
<b>ZAMBIA</b>	<b>Community Schools</b>	500,000 pupils in 3,500 centers. 72% completion and learning achievement slightly higher than public schools

Sources: Columbia (McEwan, 1998), Bangladesh (Chabbott, 2006), Balochistan (Anzar, 1999), Ghana (Hartwell, 2006), Egypt (Zaalouk, 2004), Ethiopia (Ministry of Education, 2000), Mali (DeStefano, 2004), Uganda (Burungi, Nandyose, Wood, & Kennedy, 2007), Honduras (Moore, 2004), Zambia (DeStefano, 2004)

Evaluations of complementary education programs in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Egypt, Ghana, Honduras, Mali, and Zambia indicate that children in these schools perform as well as, and in many cases better than, pupils in government schools. They also show, although the evidence on this is less clear, that recurrent per/pupil costs are comparable (and in some cases lower than) public school per pupil costs.

Figure 2 presents an analysis, drawn from case studies cited above, of the cost-effectiveness of nine complementary education models. We have analyzed the costs for access, for completion (which takes account of wastage and time period of the school cycle), and for learning outcomes, using comparable assessments for public and complementary schools.

**Fig 2**  
**Cost Effectiveness of Complementary Education Programs**  
**Compared to Public Schools in Each Country**

	Afghanistan COPE		Afghanistan IRC		Bangladesh BRAC		Egypt Community Schools		Ghana School for Life	
	Comp Ed	Public	Comp Ed	Public	Comp Ed	Public	Comp Ed	Public	Comp Ed	Public
Annual per pupil cost	\$38	\$31	\$18	\$31	\$20	\$29	\$114	\$164	\$39	\$27
Completion rate	50%	32%	68%	32%	94%	67%	92%	90%	91%	59%
Cost per completer	\$453	\$485	\$132	\$485	\$84	\$246	\$620	\$911	\$43	\$135
% students meeting learning outcome	94%	--	99%	--	70%	27%	94%	73%	81%	9%
Cost per learning outcome	\$482	--	\$134	--	\$120	\$911	\$659	\$1,248	\$53	\$1,500

	Guatemala PRONADE		Honduras Educatodos		Mali Community Schools		Zambia Community Schools	
	Comp Ed	Public	Comp Ed	Public	Comp Ed	Public	Comp Ed	Public
Annual per pupil cost	\$119	\$155	\$40	\$102	\$47	\$30	\$39	\$67
Completion rate	98%	62%	61%	68%	67%	56%	72%	72%
Cost per completer	\$729	\$1,500	\$197	\$803	\$421	\$322	\$376	\$655
% students meeting learning outcome	--	--	--	--	51%	43%	40%	35%
Cost per learning outcome	--	--	--	--	\$825	\$729	\$939	\$1,873

The analysis of the elements that contribute to what may be called ‘the opportunity to learn’, within contexts and regions that are not privileged is an ongoing project, which builds on a large literature from work on effective schools and education quality (ADEA, 2003; Moulton, 2001; Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 1999; Heneveld, 1994; Verspoor, 1989;). Early findings suggest that there are a number of core features that characterize these programs. Figure 3 provides an overview of the distribution of these features related to 1) leadership, 2) quality standards, 3) teaching and learning and 4) organization for nine of the complementary models we have studied. For comparative purposes, we have included public schools in Ghana which, on these dimensions, are typical of public schools in less developed countries.

**FIGURE 3 – CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE COMPLEMENTARY EDUCATION PROGRAMS**

	1		2		3		4		5		6		7		8		9
<b>Program<sup>7</sup></b>	<b>Ghana Public Schools<sup>8</sup></b>		<b>SFL, Ghana</b>		<b>CS Mali</b>		<b>ECTDS, Honduras</b>		<b>CS Egypt</b>		<b>BRAC</b>		<b>CS Zambia</b>		<b>EN Colombia</b>		<b>BPEP Balochistan</b>
<b>Leadership</b>																	
<b>ELEMENTS OF EFFECTIVENESS</b>																	
Vision & capacity	0		2		1		2		2		2		2		2		2
<b>Quality Standards</b>																	
Class size	1		2		1		?		2		2		1		1		2
Teachers/facilitators	1		2		2		2		2		2		2		2		2
Instructional materials	1		2		1		2		2		2		2		2		2
Learning space	1		1		1		1		2		2		1		2		1
Time on task	1		2		1		2		2		2		2		2		2
School schedule	1		2		2		2		2		2		2		2		2
Assessments	1		2		1		2		2		2		N2		2		1
<b>Teaching &amp; Learning</b>																	
Relevant curriculum	0		2		1		2		2		2		2		2		2
Mother tongue	0		2		2		2		2		2		2		2		2
Active learning	0		2		1		2		2		1		1		2		1
Learning milestones	0		1		1		2		1		1		2		2		1
Link to MoE curriculum	2		1		1		2		2		2		2		2		2
<b>Organization</b>																	
Managing for results	1		2		1		2		2		2		2		2		2
Community engaged	1		2		2		2		2		2		2		1		2
Local teachers	1		2		2		2		2		2		2		2		2
Training and support	0		2		2		2		2		2		2		2		2

0	No evidence	1	Stated goal, but weak implementation	2	Documented implementation
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<sup>7</sup> Cases: 2. School for Life; 3. Community Schools, Mali; 4. Educadados, Honduras; 5. Egypt, Community Schools; 6. BRAC; Bangladesh; 7. Community Schools, Zambia; 8. Escuela Nueva, Columbia; 9. Balochistan Primary Education Project, BPEP

<sup>8</sup> Assessment based on Ghana Education Sector Review, Ministry of Education, 2003. Other assessments based on reports and case studies: see References by country.



The characteristics of effective complementary education are not remarkable: they reflect the findings from an extensive literature on effective schools. What is remarkable is that these programs exist and are effective within some of the most underserved regions in the world. This phenomenon may partially be explained by the claim that the NGOs providing these services engage the challenges with commitment and knowledge of the culture and local political forces, often working beyond the heavy hand of bureaucracy and political contention. Some further description of what is involved, based on the review of many country cases, illustrates what it seems to take:

- **Effective leadership: vision and capacity.** An examination of successful experiences in introducing community school programs reveals the vital role of local program leadership. The successful initiation of a new program appears to require one or more persons who are well grounded in the practice if not the theory of educational reform and social change; who are well placed to organize political support and resources; who have the power of persuasion; who have the respect of community members and local authorities; and who have a commitment to assure children's learning that can withstand disappointment and contrary pressures.
- **Managing for quality standards.** In many development and educational reform efforts, there is little attempt to enforce the critical quality standards necessary for effective teaching and learning. These include: restricting class sizes (in most complementary education models class size is between 20 and 30 pupils), assuring teachers show up on time and teach classes as scheduled,<sup>9</sup> providing learners with appropriate and sufficient instructional materials in a language they understand, and providing adequate pupil learning time on relevant tasks, with feedback. Successful community school programs view supervisors and managers as support staff who themselves are learning to enhance the role of the teacher in supporting the children's learning. The commitment to management in support of children's learning, in a continual process of organizational learning, is critical for effectiveness and quality.
- **Teaching and Learning: children's learning is central.** The most successful complementary education programs emphasize the goal of enhancing the learning of the children who attend the school. In contrast, public schools generally place greatest emphasis on teachers 'covering' the official curriculum even when it is evident that the great majority children are not learning anything. Complementary models utilize official curriculum frameworks (where these exist) but develop and provide instructional materials and texts in a language that the pupils understand, that are relevant to pupils' lives, and assure that these are used. Further, in many programs, decisions regarding the use of class space and furniture, timetable, class set-up and activity grouping, are based on what is conducive to supporting the children's learning.
- **Local governance and partnerships.** The primary school is established and operated as a village based institution, albeit supported by regular and effective professional supervisors, trainers and managers. The management framework for an effective community school program will reflect national regulations and historical experience in the establishment and recognition of schools. The definition of roles, responsibilities and resources requires on-going negotiations between the public authorities—primarily a ministry of education—and the organization(s) taking the initiative to establish community schools.

The inability of governments and public education systems to organize primary schools in poor, underserved, and largely rural areas that have these characteristics has led to a world wide phenomena of international and local NGOs, and multilateral aid organizations such as UNICEF, providing the initiative and financial support

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<sup>9</sup> Recent analysis of 'time on task' in Ghana indicates that pupils in public primary schools, experience, on average, no more than half of the total time given by the timetable for instruction (Meruku, 2005)

for complementary education programs. It is evident from the case studies cited above, and a large body of literature on other cases of alternative models of primary education (Farrell, 2003; Molteno, 2000; Miller-Grandvaux, 2002; Glassman, 2007, Rugh, 1998; Zimmer, 1998) that, within the past two decades, alternative forms of primary education have developed rapidly across the rural landscape of developing countries. This is no doubt a good example of the complex adaptive system's principle that innovations can best grow at the periphery of a system, where there is more policy 'space' and less contested ground. But it also reflects the reality that central governments in many less developed countries are overwhelmed by the expectations of global policy agendas (MDG and EFA), the pressures and demands from multiple multilateral and bilateral donors, and systems of power and authority that deny local voice, innovation and responsive decision-making. There are numerous policy issues and questions that arise from these considerations:

Can public financing and institutions, including international bilateral and multilateral agencies, be used to provide sustained support for complementary education programs which provide the 'opportunity to learn,' to underserved regions and groups? If so, how might this work?

Are there policies and practices that have worked for complementary education programs that can be applied in regular public schools? How might this be done? Specifically, could public education systems:

- Reduce the size, and modify the organization of schools for low-density rural communities, where, for example, no more than 50 school-age children reside;<sup>10</sup>
- Decentralize decision-making and respond to local concerns over the timing of the school day and calendar; the selection, support and supervision of teachers;
- Develop a responsive, relevant curriculum and pedagogy, including the use of the local language for instruction and discourse with community.

### **The Case of School For Life, Northern Ghana**

These generalizations about the characteristics of complementary education, and the policy issues they raise, come to life within a specific country and location in the case of School for Life in the Northern Region of Ghana (Akyampong, 2004, Hartwell, 2006). What follows is a somewhat detailed description of the context, effectiveness, organization, curriculum, teachers, staffing, and relationships for the program, illustrating how the general characteristics and principles outlined above are exemplified in practice.

School for Life provides a nine-month education program for youth aged 8 to 15 years in rural villages where there is no, or very low, access to primary education. It provides literacy in the mother tongue, numeracy and general knowledge equivalent to three grades of primary schooling. Approximately 70% of the students in School for Life continue on to public primary schools at grade 4.<sup>11</sup>

School for Life was established in 1996 through a partnership of the Dagbon traditional Council, The Ghana Friendship Groups in Denmark (funded by Danida) and the Ghana Education Service in northern Ghana, and now operates in eight districts and four language areas in the Northern Region.<sup>12</sup>

In its statement of purpose and principles, School for Life espouses a holistic approach to development. This means engaging the whole human being intellectually, physically and spiritually. School for Life aims at

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<sup>10</sup> An excellent resource of research and practice for the support to small, multi-grade rural schools (albeit, based on experience in rural Northwest, USA) Vincent (1999).

<sup>11</sup> Information on School for Life is based on field visits, reports, interviews and records provided by program staff, thanks to Dorte Joergensen and Alhaji Abdulai, and by the work of Leslie Casely-Hayford, in particular 'Reaching Underserved Populations with Basic Education in Deprived Areas of Ghana: Emerging Good Practices. CARE. 2003.'

<sup>12</sup> Starting In 2004, USAID began to support the expansion of SFL through the EQUALL Project.

creating synergy and relevance between the learner, the classroom, the home and the rest of the community. This is to generate a harmonic and balanced society with mutual respect and understanding between sexes, ethnic groups, generations and social groups (Hartwell, 2006).

### **The Northern Region of Ghana**

The Northern Region of Ghana accounts for almost a third of Ghana's land area and is inhabited by about 10% of its population with a population density of less than 25 people per square kilometer. Poverty is endemic in Northern Ghana with the people facing formidable challenges with regards to water, food livelihood, and employment opportunities. With limited access to potable water and few economic opportunities, younger generations, especially girls, have few chances to find productive work. As a result many are not able to remain in their home villages. A significant percentage of girl children—between the ages of 12-18 years—migrate from the north to urban areas to find employment and earn money for the dowry in order to prepare for marriage. There are also significant challenges related to child fostering (girl children are given to an extended relative, usually an aunt, to be raised) and the poor perception of girls' education in the region which encourages parental preference for males to be educated due to the traditional roles of the girl child, inheritance lines, and security of parents in their latter years (Caseley-Hayford, 2003).

National statistics indicate that the literacy rate among adults in the Northern Region is lower than 5%. Approximately 40% of school-age children years are out of school, the majority of whom are girls (Hartwell, 2006). The great majority of children do not complete the compulsory nine years of primary schooling and consequently do not attain a basic level of literacy.

### **Effectiveness of the School for Life Program**

Three dimensions of effectiveness are analyzed here. First is the issue of whether the School for Life program increases **access** within the catchment areas where it operates, and the degree to which it has expanded children's access to basic education in the Region. However, it is not enough that children enter school, the important thing is that they stay long enough to gain the basic knowledge and competencies of basic education. The second dimension of effectiveness is **completion**. What percentage of those who enter School for Life complete the program? Even if children enter school and complete a cycle, little is gained unless they have actually learned how to read, write, calculate, and use these tools to solve real life problems. The third dimension of effectiveness is **evidence of learning** as reflected by the achievement of minimum levels of competency in reading comprehension, writing and numeracy. For each of these dimensions, we attempt to compare the performance of School for Life with Ghana's public schools.

#### ***Access***

From 1996 through 2003, School for Life had enrolled 50,000 children and youth, of whom 50% (25,150) were girls. The annual enrolment by 2000 was just over 9,000 pupils. What does this contribute to the Northern Region's enrolment rate? The 9,000 students in School for Life each year, if simply added to the 131,000 pupils in grades 1 to 3 in public schools, raises the gross enrolment rate for grades 1 to 3 in the Region from 69% to 83.3%.

School for Life reaches approximately 25% of the villages in the districts where it works, targeting those locations where there is no formal school, or where there is very low enrollment in the public primary school. It is continually expanding its operations, which in 2003 reached almost 800 villages.

### ***Completion***

Of those students who enter School for Life, more than 91% complete the 9 mo. program, Of those who complete the School for Life program, 66% continue to grade 4 in formal schools. This rate is actually higher for girls, at 68%. Of those who enter School for Life 60% go on to grade 4 in public schools. This is actually higher than the 48% of those who enter Grade 1 in public schools surviving to grade 4. No doubt a large part of this difference is simply that the School for Life only takes nine months to complete, whereas the pressures for dropout in the 1<sup>st</sup> three grades of public schools operate over a three year period.

### ***Learning***

In 2003 School for Life requested that the Ghana Education Service conduct a survey to test School for Life pupils toward the end of the 9 month cycle. 81.2% of the children in School for Life are able to meet the minimum standards for literacy and numeracy at grade 3 level.

There is no means of directly comparing learning of School for Life students with students in public schools, since there is no standardized national test at Grade 3. However, the Criterion Referenced Test (CRT), given to a 10% national sample of students at grade 6 each year, provides a benchmark of learning performance in primary schools in language and mathematics. On that test only 8.7% of the 6<sup>th</sup> grade students achieved minimum competency level in English Language Although the CRT is not a test of literacy, the results imply that as many as 90% of the students in Grade 6 do not perform at the minimum level of reading (in English). This is in contrast to the 81% of the School for Life pupils in grade 3 who are able to read (in their own language) with comprehension.

### ***Cost Effectiveness***

The analysis of cost-effectiveness is based on a comparison between School for Life and public primary schools on the three effectiveness dimensions: 1) the costs for access – reflected by the annual recurrent per pupil costs; 2) the costs for completion – reflected by how much is required for a pupil to complete (in this case completion of grade 3 equivalency), and 3) the cost of achieving a measurable learning outcome, based on the percentage of pupils who achieve a minimum level of competency at grade level. On these dimensions, the cost-effectiveness of School for Life, in relation to public schools, is illustrated in the table below:

**Table 2**

#### **COST- EFFECTIVENESS: School for Life and Public Schools**

	<b>ACCESS</b> Recurrent unit cost	<b>COMPLETION</b> <b>Grade 3 equivalent</b> Annual recurrent cost times years in school divided by completion rate	<b>LEARNING</b> Completion unit cost divided by % pupils meeting minimum standards of literacy
<b>School for Life</b>	\$39	\$43	\$53
<b>Ghana Public Schools</b>	\$27	\$135	\$1500

Hartwell, 2006

It is important to note that although the annual recurrent unit costs for School for Life is slightly higher than the national average for Ghana's public primary schools, grades one to six, School for Life is operating in areas

where public schools have not been able to reach, and where, if they were to operate effectively, unit costs would undoubtedly be higher than the national average.

The relative efficiency of the School for Life program becomes evident when comparing costs for completion. Since School for Life only operates for nine months, and has a 91% completion rate, it is more than three times as cost-effective on this measure than public schools. The huge difference in costs per learner meeting minimum standards between School for Life and public schools is due to an 81% rate of literacy for School for Life, in comparison to a 9% minimum competency level on the CRT English Language test in public schools. One could argue that if only 9% of public school sixth graders are proficient, then even fewer third graders would meet minimum standards, making the figure \$1500 an under-estimate of the cost of learning for grade three in public schools.

### **Characteristics of School for Life**

What are the elements in the organization and running of these schools that contribute to this high level of effectiveness? What can we learn from these 800 schools that provide some insight into how, even in a remote, poor and underserved area, the great majority of children are able to succeed, to learn, and to progress to the next level of education?

### ***School Organization***

Over the decade since the initiation of the program, there has been a consistent commitment of the leadership to education principles: *The education program aims to develop in the children a sense of critical thinking and activeness, which will reflect in the society at large and promote active participation in democratic processes. School for Life aims at creating synergy and relevance between the learner, the classroom, the home and the rest of the community.*

School for Life is organized as a partnership which includes a Danish NGO, the Ghana Friendship Groups in Denmark (funded by DANIDA), the Dagbon traditional Council, and the Ghana Education Service in the Northern Region.<sup>13</sup> A School for Life Executive Board provides policy guidance and appoints senior staff. At the central office a Program Coordinator and Deputy manage a staff of ten. There are six staff in two area offices, and 25 staff at the field level within eight districts, with a field-staff to class ratio of 1 to 14. School for Life places a good deal of emphasis on continued staff professional development, and each year all field, supervisory and management staff are involved in at least one weekly course.

Typically, School for Life has only one class within a single community/village. The pupil teacher ratio is not allowed to exceed 25:1. Classes are multi-age, from 8 to 15 years, and are not graded. All pupils work on the same topics/issues, with older/more advanced pupils helping others. In contrast, in public schools class size varies greatly. In lower primary classes in the Northern Region teachers often handle more than 40 pupils.

In those communities where there are more than twenty-five children and youth who want to join School for Life, but there is only one facilitator available, the older youth are taken into the first cohort. The program then runs the classes over the following years until all children and youth in the community have been enrolled. This results in virtually all of the children and youth within the catchment area of the program receiving a basic education equivalent to a three year public school.

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<sup>13</sup> In 2004 USAID, through the EDC/EQUALL Project, began supporting SfL to expand to new districts and language areas.

### ***Community & Local Committee***

In order to select target communities animation is done in sampled communities when entering a new district. This is done in close cooperation with Department of Community Development (DCD). Communities are animated on all the aspects of School for Life and the importance of education to their own individual and communal development. They are invited to identify their facilitator and to form a local School for Life committee as criteria for applying for a class.

The local committee makes the formal application to have a SfL class and, if a class is approved, the committee has the responsibility for supervision of the day-to-day teaching activities, monitoring the life of the class and taking decisions about the class. They are also responsible for checking up on absent children and organizing the community's support to the facilitator. The committee typically consists of three women and two men, usually with representation of the chief, the women's leader, and a district assembly member. The successful running of the class is the responsibility of the community itself.

Although committee members are encouraged to visit the classes regularly, evidence is that typically this happens about once a month. If the community is not satisfied with a facilitator's performance this is reported and acted upon by the School for Life supervisor and district coordinator. In many communities parents/adults help with teaching crafts, gardening, and drama/dance.

### ***Schedule***

School for Life classes run for 9 months each year, from October through June, with July-Aug-September free when farming activities are at their highest - for harvesting and planting. Classes are held in the afternoon for five days a week. The local School for Life Committee determines the timing for the classes, and the two free days each week - usually market days and Fridays in Muslim communities, and Sundays in Christian communities

The children and youth typically arrive at the School for Life site at 2pm, and are at the session until 5pm. If there is an important event (e.g. funeral, celebration, etc) in the community, the school will break to support that. Field reports from School for Life indicate a very high proportion of total class time is utilized for teacher/learner interaction and practice on literacy and numeracy. Lesson designs focus entirely on building literacy and numeracy skills, based on discussion and representation of issues/topics directly relevant to the communities and the pupils' lives. In contrast, teacher attendance and time on task in public schools has been recognized to be a serious problem, with only 50% of total school time of approximately 1000 hours, as specified by policy, used for instruction (Mereku, 2005). This study, examining teacher performance in public schools, found that only about 30% of this limited instructional time was used for building language and numeracy skills.

The schedule in School for Life also includes sporting activities, handicrafts, singing and dancing, since these are an important part of the child's life. Classes compose their own School for Life songs, making teaching lively and engaging.

### ***Community-based Facilitators: Recruitment, Training and Supervision***

Facilitators are recruited directly from the communities in which they live. Instead of depending on formally trained teachers, who are often very difficult to attract to or retain in the rural areas, facilitators are nominated and recruited by the communities themselves. The facilitators are preferably teachers or community development workers or secondary school leavers who are literate. School for Life staff encourages the communities to nominate female facilitators to act as role models for girls. The facilitator will work as a

volunteer, with only an annual incentive (equivalent to the price of half a bicycle) and monthly ‘soap-money’ as formal payment. The monthly support is only symbolic to add to the assistance (in the form of foodstuffs, labor or cash) that the community is committed to give.

A comprehensive training program is followed. Three weeks in-house training is done initially and every three months facilitators are given refresher courses at the various district centers. A core team of resource persons, including staff from the Ghana Education Service, runs the courses. They have been trained in the special School for Life approach and teach in the language of the facilitators. Guest resource persons are called in from various areas for topical issues. After some years of service facilitators are given various opportunities to further their own education, e.g. by supporting potential teachers to gain the formal qualifications required by the training colleges. Some of the facilitators return, after further training, to join the SFL staff as supervisors and trainers.

A major component of the School for Life approach is the efficient and frequent supervision and monitoring of classes that focuses on supporting the facilitators at the class-level to deliver quality instruction. Classes are visited at least once a month and facilitators are given on-the spot training by the supervisor. This regular in-service training reinforces new skills and serves to improve the quality of the instruction. It rekindles the facilitators’ commitment. Field staffs are based in the district. District Supervisors supervise 25 classes each and a District Coordinator carries out frequent monitoring of classes and coaches the supervisors. Management carries out random monitoring of the classes and facilitators as well as the field staff and holds discussions with communities.

### ***Curriculum***

School for Life has three focus areas: mother-tongue language; mathematics; and environmental studies - and these are integrated in the instructional materials so that there is neither a set of grades, nor specific subject areas. Rather the materials deal with topical themes integrating math, language and science. While this curriculum does not replicate the full national curriculum, which includes seven discrete subjects and is graded, the pupils do gain the core competencies in literacy, numeracy and life skills that well prepares them for further education.

The teaching materials are based on issues known to the child: livestock, the body, hygiene, sanitation, the local environment. The texts help the teacher work with the children in moving from the known to the unknown, stressing learning that incorporates practice with theory. The children feel that their home and school work walk hand in hand, with classroom learning applicable at home.

Teaching and learning aids available in the immediate surroundings are used (e.g. crop seeds or pebbles as counters in doing numeracy, farming tools, basket weaving, etc.). Moreover, the knowledge base available in the community is used actively (e.g. story-telling, traditional games, plays and songs) and also through the use of audiocassettes in the classroom work. Active participation of the children, focus on daily activities at community level and learning by doing therefore form major components of the pedagogic approach.

### ***Mother Tongue Textbooks & Materials***

All pupils have texts, and all facilitators have a teachers manual, written in the local language. Instruction is sequential with emphasis on the phonetic approach to language learning. The comprehensive and detailed teaching manual in the language of the community guides the facilitator through the sequences of literacy and numeracy teaching. All teaching is done in the mother tongue. Other literacy materials are developed in the local language. The mother tongue literacy is sustained and developed by School for Life providing the communities with a mini-library of extra readers in the local language.

### ***Teacher-Pupil Relationships***

School for Life staff believe that their success derives from the emphasis they place on the teaching & learning in mother tongue. In addition to the research demonstrating its efficacy as a means of transition to acquiring English literacy, the use of local language contributes to the building of self-esteem, and creates receptiveness to the program by the local community. In 2004, School for Life operated in 4 regional languages, and as it further expands it will add new local languages (as long as they have a written form and a literature).

The use of a language that the children speak and understand provides the opportunity for pupils to fully participate in class activities, and to effectively work in small groups. It is observed that the relationship between teacher and pupil is 'friendly' and interactive. This is in radical contrast to the authoritarian and harsh treatment children receive at the hands of teachers in Ghana's public school classrooms, where the use of corporeal punishment with slaps, sticks and tubing is widespread (Lavan, 2004, pp146-147). In School for Life pupils are encouraged to speak up, to ask questions, to engage in discussions, and they are able to do so by using their own language. Thus, classes have a far higher level of active children, interacting with understanding, using textbooks as a resource to discuss familiar topics and issues, and demonstrating creativity in class activities.

It is important to note that the characteristics which make School for Life markedly different – and far more effective - than public primary schools in northern Ghana operate within a complex social, political and bureaucratic context. These characteristics can not be extracted and injected into public schools. They are inextricably connected in an organic system, which is destroyed if key organs are removed, and the key organs do not function when transplanted into an alien organism. Providing quality basic education in northern Ghana is not simply a technical, educational matter of revising a curriculum, training teachers, or providing better resources to schools, even if this was feasible and affordable. What this case, and the other cases cited in this paper demonstrate, is rather a reconceptualization of the forms of schooling, and the organization and relationships necessary to provide children the opportunity to learn.

### **Conclusion: Policy Reform - Learning for All**

*The task of public agencies is not to invent policy or implement education reforms across the nation, but rather to develop and unleash a capacity to innovate throughout the system. (Farrell, 1997)*

State organized and sponsored schooling as presently planned, financed and managed in less developed countries, and particularly for underserved regions of those countries, is not succeeding in providing the learning opportunities implied by the MDG and EFA declarations. Schools in the great majority of these settings, whatever the stated policy declarations, and the intents of development agencies supporting basic education, maintain relationships of power and authority that stifle opportunities to learn, actively suppressing critical reflection and analysis and the development of democratic relationships within classrooms and schools. Schools' central social and political function, both during and after the colonial experience, has been as a vehicle for sorting the population, and selecting a limited few for further formal educational opportunity and employment within the public sector or the small formal economic sector.

With the declaration of EFA, and education sector programs leading to the rapid expansion of enrollments and new schools, a fundamental contradiction has emerged. Public schools in development countries, and the education system that supports them, use a competitive, zero-sum examination process that was designed to select out the majority. Little wonder then that the school system and the teachers continue to function as if selection out of 'worthless' pupils was their duty.

Yet countries do recognize the importance of educating all their citizens, and the expansion of access and the improvement of quality is a rhetorical declaration of virtually all education sector plans. The recent analysis of



the link between a populations' cognitive learning achievement (rather than just educational attainment) and economic development makes it clear that 'learning for all' becomes a central national strategy for human resource development (Hanushek & Wossman, 2007).

Further, we have noted in this chapter that it is possible to provide quality basic education, where the great majority of pupils gain basic skills and capacity, for a cost that is reasonable, in even the most underserved regions of the world. Secondly, although the progress towards achieving access to basic education for all appears to be improving, especially over the past five years (UNESCO, 2007), this counts for little unless pupils are learning to read, write, use text as a tool of thought, and acquire those competencies and understandings implied by the international declaration that basic education is a human right.

What would it take for Ministries of Education with the backing of the Ministry of Finance and Planning, and support from international donor agencies, to create the learning environments that complementary education programs embody? What, in Farrell's provocative words, would it take public agencies *to develop and unleash a capacity to innovate throughout the system*? These questions are central to the use of international and public financing for supporting the development of effective education that will reach the underserved.

Clearly, there is a fundamental shift needed in the concept and practice of national education planning so that it would support an education system that enhanced learning, rather than controlled it, that built the capacity for innovation, rather than coercing the world to conform to its preconceived designs. At present the process of education reform and planning embodied within international models for national planning require analytic expertise (and international consultants) to establish a supposedly efficient combination of inputs and processes that lead to clearly measured and targeted outcomes and indicators. The Dakar (EFA) Framework for Action states that *countries will prepare comprehensive National EFA Plans by 2002 at the latest...Each National EFA Plan will:*

*i) be developed by government leadership in direct and systematic consultation with national civic society; ii) attract coordinated support of all development partners; iii) specify reforms addressing the six EFA goals; iv) establish a sustainable financial framework; v) be time-bound and action-oriented; vi) include mid-term performance indicators; and vii) achieve a synergy of all human development efforts, through its inclusion within the national development planning framework and process* (UNESCO, 2000, pp 7-8).

These national sector plans have led to education reform being largely construed in terms of the increase of inputs (trained teachers, infrastructure, instructional materials and texts, training for local and district educators) and increasing the financing of established school systems. A central difficulty with this policy reform and planning process is that the hierarchical, authoritarian, and control relationships between the central state and regions/districts, and between district officials and schools & communities is mirrored by the relationship between the school head, the teachers and the learners. Yet, to create the opportunity to learn, a transformation in these relationships is what is needed.

To illustrate, support for pupil learning requires a transformation of over-dominant, authoritarian relationship between teacher and students, reinforced by the language of instruction which pupils do not comprehend. Rather than the teacher being the sole source of knowledge, the arbiter of the official syllabus, and the enforcer of discipline, the teacher's role in effective schools changes so as to facilitate learning, which is not brought forth by command. The teacher, with a set of appropriate learning materials, in a language that the pupils understand, becomes a guide to knowledge building, rather than the only source of information and authority. This is the kind of shift that has been demonstrated by many of the more effective community schools, such as Columbia's Escuela Nueva, Egypt's community schools, and Ghana's School for Life.

Likewise, for the places we call schools to become learning communities, supported by parents and local authorities, would itself require a transformation in relationships between the central state and localities. Presently, the state, either at the national, or in some countries at the regional or district level, provides a plan, with predetermined inputs (teachers, curriculum syllabi, textbooks), regulations for organization and administrative processes (school timetables, keeping school records and accounts), and periodic oversight to assure compliance.

In reality, in poorer countries these 'plans' are seldom implemented. This failure is analyzed as of lack of institutional capacity (for planning and management) and inadequate finances. These are considered major problems of educational efficiency and quality. The Dakar Framework, and the financing that it promises, is intended to address these inefficiencies, and to support the capacity and inputs that are believed necessary to expand access and improve educational quality. However, the problem is not inadequate service delivery, but a failure in the relationship between the state and the people.

In the relationships between the teacher and the learner, the school and the teacher, and the state and the school, plans, directions, knowledge and resources flow from the source of power and authority to the recipient. The change of these relationships so that respect, appreciation and power flow between all parties is the essence of the transformation wanted. From this conception it is the child, the learner, and the community that is supported in self-organized learning, rather than 'taught', coerced, and 'developed' by the teacher, the school, or the state. This is well articulated in the School for Life principles, repeated here for emphasis: *The education program aims to develop in the children a sense of critical thinking and activeness, which will reflect in the society at large and promote active participation in democratic processes. School for Life builds synergy between the learner, the classroom, the home, and the community to facilitate mutual respect and understanding between sexes, ethnic groups, generations, and social groups.* (Hartwell, 2006, p7)

Some of this transformation has begun. The modern nation state is rapidly losing control of key instruments of power and authority – economic policy and information. As the global network of finances and information penetrate virtually all national borders, authoritarian states either disintegrate or are reshaped into more open, diverse political entities. It is estimated that networking and the international exchange of information is doubling every two years. From one perspective, this force is destructive, in that it promotes competitive, market-driven economic relationships, undermining the nexus of socially responsible, caring communities that are necessary for our wellbeing. On the other hand, some argue that the Internet erodes national sovereignty while strengthening the ability of non-western powers to resist penetration by Western cultures, and themselves penetrate the West (Farrell, 1997, p.310). It is a confusing time, with forces both leading to a world more diverse, more articulate of cultural identity, and yet with far greater interdependency.

The Dakar Framework, while it urges a participatory process, remains stuck with a schooling model which is to be expanded and improved, not transformed. In place of the current emphasis on national plans to expand and improve a model of schooling which is inefficient, if not actively harmful to building human capacity, there needs to be fresh policy thinking and initiatives to examine three options:

- Policy Option 1: Could national education sector programs explicitly include public support for complementary education approaches provided through NGO's?

This option has a historical precedent, at least in the former Anglophone colonies that now compose most of the countries of the Commonwealth. The Grants-in-Aid system widely used during the 1950's provided financing from government directly to non-governmental organizations (for the most part these were religious NGOs) to organize and manage schooling. Tentative steps in that direction have been taken in Zambia, Ethiopia and Ghana. Yet, there are serious obstacles and challenges to this strategy, not least the government's capacity for oversight and accountability of public funds directed to NGOs. Politically, it is highly problematic, as the experience of Charter Schools within the US demonstrates. In Bangladesh, the

weakness of the government in managing both internal and external funds has thus far frustrated efforts for financing BRAC with public funds, although it must get government approval for its use of foreign donor funds (Chabbott, 2006).

- Policy Option 2: Can there be a partnership between government and NGOs with demonstrated capacity for organizing and managing complementary education to introduce practices and innovations within the public school system?

Quite a number of the programs cited in this chapter actually engage in this practice, notably Uganda (Birungi, Nandyose, Wood & Kennedy, 2007); Egypt (Zaalouk, 2004), Bangladesh (Chabbott, 2006). Two critiques emerge from the experience: first, the scale and impact of influence tend to be marginal unless there is strong policy support for the process. Secondly, and more telling, the introduction of new pedagogy and training in itself has little impact without more fundamental changes in such policy matters as the deployment and support to teachers; the engagement and participation of the community in school governance; the language policy on the medium of instruction. When these policy issues are not addressed, the impact of community school experience on public schooling appears marginal (Birungi, op.cit.). It is significant that the entry of major US foundations (Hewlett and Gates) into the arena of quality education in the development world uses this approach to finance an initiative to improve reading and numeracy in India by Pratham. ("The Hewlett and Gates Foundations", 2007).

- Policy Option 3: Can the government itself undertake, with support of international organizations and services from NGOs, a complementary education program?

Perhaps the oldest and best known example of this approach is in Columbia, with the Escuela Nueva, and later in Guatemala with the externally funded Nueva Unitaria. In Columbia, Escuela Nueva suffered a marked decline in quality when government, with funding from the World Bank, attempted to rapidly expand the system (McEwan, 1998). In Bangladesh, government has indicated that it would like to coordinate all education programs, but it has i) less experienced and capable personnel than BRAC to work in rural areas; ii) less transparent and weaker financial control than large NGOs such as BRAC; iii) reluctant to implement its own decentralization policies; and iv) reluctant to increase the actual allocation of funds for supporting rural basic education (Chabbot, 2006).

Whichever policy option, or combination of policy options, international agencies and national governments may choose to pursue, what is clear is that there needs to be a rethinking of how to provide schooling, a reorganization of the educational process, if there is to be progress toward MDG and EFA goals for quality basic education. One source of insight into how to do this exists in the growing experience of effective complementary education programs for underserved areas. There is a growing awareness that it is time to begin to apply what is known about learning, and about social change, into international and national programs of educational reform so as to move towards Learning for All, rather than just Education for All. The question remains as to how governments, in partnership with international agencies and NGOs, can do this.

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